

### First Stamp Issued in 1847

The adoption of adhesive postage stamps in 1847, for use in the prepayment of postage on mail matter, represented one of the most important single improvements in the history of the Postal Service in America. As provided by law, these stamps were designed to be issued to postmasters on account, for sale to the public, thereby providing an accurate and automatic check on the postage revenues, in lieu of the less uniform and more uncertain methods that had prevailed in the past.

Prior to the issuance of the first stamps, letters accepted by postmasters for dispatch were marked "Paid" or "Due," by means of pen and ink or hand stamps of various designs. To facilitate the handling of mail matters, many postmasters provided special stamps or devices for use on letters as evidence of the prepayment of postage. These stamps of local origin were known as "Postmasters' stamps" or "Provisionals." After the introduction of postage stamps, these various methods of mailing without stamps affixed continued to be legal until the prepayment of postage by means of stamps of government issue was made obligatory by law, effective July 1, 1855.

As soon as possible after the enactment of the law on March 3, 1847, authorizing the issuance of adhesive postage stamps, contract was entered into with a private manufacturer for the printing of the quantities required for placing on sale July 1, following. Subsequent contracts for postage stamps continued to be awarded to private manufacturers until July 1, 1894, on which date the printing of stamps was transferred to the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, Treasury Department, where all postage stamps have since been produced.

(Excerpt from "A Description of United States Postage Stamps issued by the Post Office Department from July 1, 1847, to December 31, 1936," obtainable from Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C.)